The Confederate Flag in the White Rural North: A Political History

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

The Confederate flag is perhaps the most divisive symbol in American history. It is historically associated with the Confederate States of America and the Southern United States. In the past century, however, it has transcended its regional bounds and become a prominent symbol within the "redneck" culture of the white rural North. Politically, the question over the Confederate flag's role in the modern United States is perfectly divided along party lines. The Confederate flag has become intrinsically linked with the Conservative movement and the institutional Republican Party. This study seeks to examine and explain the political history of the Confederate flag as it has made its transition from a symbol of the South to a symbol of the white rural North.

Acknowledgements

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In memory of Dr. Jim Ruebel and Mr. Ron Simons, mentors whose belief in me pushed me to pursue an honors education at Ball State University.

Process Analysis

Engaging in this study required me to synthesize the variety of research, thinking, and writing skills I have developed over my time as a student of History at Ball State University. I initially became interested in issues related to the Confederate flag as a result of my participation in an Honors Colloquium on the memory of the Civil War in the Spring of 2016. Confederate flags are common place in the rural North, however, this has always seemed contradictory since the North and South were enemies in the Civil War. My participation in the Honors Colloquium furthered my interest in explaining this phenomenon. As such, I made the focus on my senior honors project uncovering exactly how the Confederate flag became such a prominent symbol in the white rural North.

With this guiding question in mind I consulted a number of sources to begin my investigation. Based on my experiences growing up in the rural North, I knew that popular culture influenced acceptance of the flag, especially as country music and *The Dukes of Hazzard* were incredibly popular among the same groups of people I had observed flying the Confederate flag. I also consulted literature on the subject, primarily the work of John Coski. I quickly realized that the Confederate flag was deeply linked to elements of social conservatism and anti-government sentiment common among rural communities. I found overwhelming evidence to support this conclusion in secondary source literature, anecdotal accounts provided by journalists, and polling data from the past few years.

Based on conversations with my advisor for this project, Dr. Nicole Etcheson of the Department of History, I decided that interviewing people from the rural North about their views on the Confederate flag would provide an excellent opportunity to gather new information. This

was quite the undertaking for me, as I had never completed an oral history project and had never used interviews in historical research. These interviews formed a crucial aspect of my study, however. For one, they provided direct confirmation of my main hypothesis—that politically conservative views are positively correlated with support for the Confederate flag. Even more interesting, however, was how the interviews revealed something that the other sources I had reviewed did not. My interviews suggested that a prominent age gap may exist in views on the Confederate flag. Across all demographic and political identifications, I found that younger individuals were much more likely to have an open mind on the flag and be willing to accept multiple interpretations. This contrasted with older individuals who, again across other identifications, seemed to see the Confederate flag as an entirely harmless symbol.

Completing this study was the perfect capstone to my experience in the Honors College and as a History major at Ball State University. It required me to employ all of the skills I have honed throughout my studies here. For example, I was required to synthesize evidence from a wide variety of primary and secondary sources into a coherent argument to explain a historical phenomenon. As such, completing this process allowed me to demonstrate my understanding of the ways of thinking and tools of inquiry of the discipline of History. The project was also an incredible learning opportunity, as it allowed me to work with a method of historical inquiry—oral history—that I had previously not been exposed to. In completing this project, I have demonstrated my capabilities as an Honors history student by using the discipline of History to answer a question which has pressing implications for understanding the political landscape of an incredibly polarized modern United States.

The Confederate Flag in the White Rural North: A Political History

On the battlegrounds of America's culture wars, few issues have been more divisive than that of the Confederate flag.[1] The Confederate flag has a more complex, more hotly contested meaning than perhaps any other symbol in American History. The flag's uses and meanings have been constantly evolving and developing since its inception as the symbol of an army fighting to preserve the institution of slavery. First used by the Confederate military during the Civil War, it was banned for a period during the Reconstruction Era when Union armies occupied the Southern states. After the ban was lifted, the flag was used primarily as a revered memorial symbol, most commonly in ceremonies to honor Confederate war dead. During the Civil Rights era, the flag became a much larger political issue, as it became associated with a variety of anti-civil rights, anti-federal government, pro-states' rights political causes. In the 1970s and 1980s the flag weaved its way into popular culture, becoming a symbol of "good ole boys" and "rednecks" first in the South and later in the North. Several notable confrontations between Confederate flag supporters and detractors erupted during the 1990s, ranging from the backwoods of Kentucky to the halls of the United States Senate. In the early 21st century, it has once again returned as a key symbolic battlefield in the wars over American culture. Recent flag controversies have been spurred by racially charged mass shootings and violent neo-Confederate rallies. The current President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, has been an outspoken supporter of preserving Confederate symbols, and leveraged the issue to garner support in white rural communities throughout the country during his campaign.

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[1] The flag that most Americans consider "the Confederate flag" is in fact the Confederate Battle Flag, a blue Saint Andrew's Cross on a red field. This flag was never the national flag of the Confederacy, and was only ever used in any official capacity by the Confederate military. For simplicity's sake, throughout this paper I will refer to the Confederate battle flag by its colloquial name, the Confederate flag.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the flag's role in America's political and social history is its prominence in the Northern states, especially in areas of the white rural North. Though historically a Southern symbol, the Confederate flag has become a common sight in white rural Northern communities, and is particularly representative of political and cultural resistance. This study will demonstrate how the Confederate flag's legacy as a mark of resistance against perceived political and cultural elites has remained consistent from its inception as an anti-government symbol during the Civil Rights Movement to today. It is precisely this connection to anti-government sentiment which explains the prevalence of and support for the Confederate flag in the modern North.

The flag was first exported to the North as a product of anti-government sentiment during the Civil Rights Movement. From this point on it became increasingly related to and formed an integral part of the Republican Party's focus on states' rights, small government, and conservative social polices. Prominent figures in the history of the Republican Party have demonstrated support for the Confederate flag. This began with the 1964 Presidential Campaign of Senator Barry Goldwater and the beginning of the Republican Party's Southern strategy to reclaim electoral success in the South. Since Goldwater, other prominent Republicans from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush and Donald Trump have offered either implicit or explicit support for the flag to win over political conservatives, especially, but not solely, in the South. The impact of these endorsements has been profound, as they have caused the Confederate flag to become effectively fused with the ideology of the Republican Party and the conservative movement. Thus, as polling data and anecdotal evidence indicate, support for the Confederate flag has become almost exclusively a political issue, making it no longer a merely regional conflict.

During this period of Republican appeal to Southern voters, elements of Southern culture also began to become incredibly popular in the North. TV Shows such as *The Dukes of Hazzard,* country music, and NASCAR have all become incredibly popular in white rural Northern communities. Each of these Southern cultural products makes use of the Confederate flag as symbolic of a carefree country life. This type of carefree country lifestyle is a key component of the "redneck" culture common throughout the rural North. Therefore, the Confederate flag has formed an integral part of white Northern popular culture. With the Confederate flag being integrally associated with white rural communities, any perceived attempt to ban it or remove it from the public square is seen as an attempt to smother out the culture of the white North, as well as the South. As such, attacks on the flag, particularly those from the political left, are seen as a full frontal assault on the rural way of life, not just on the South. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this viewpoint has caused political support for the Confederate flag to skyrocket in recent years, as each new controversy makes white rural Northerners more defensive of their beloved cultural symbol.

Due to the flag's position in the culture wars as a symbol that is under attack from mysterious, often unnamed political and cultural elites, its supporters have almost exclusively aligned themselves with the political right. There are, of course, specific groups attacking the Confederate flag—the NAACP and the Democratic Party to name a few. This idea of unnamed elites threatening the flag was a common theme in interviews with white rural Northerners, though this aspect is notably absent from the literature. However, when supporters of the Confederate flag are interviewed, they rarely name any specific threat, instead making only vague mentions of liberals and the media. This connection between conservative ideology on other social issues and the Confederate flag has proven crucial in expanding its base of political

support beyond the deep South and the states of the former Confederacy. Though the flag may have first entered Northern culture through popular culture, the attacks that have been made on it from the political left have cemented its position and emboldened countless supporters to rise to its defense. As such, the flag has become for many white rural Northerners simply another area of their lives that the faceless elites want to intrude on and upend.

The Confederate flag has a long and complicated history. The flag began in the early days of the Confederacy. In the winter immediately after the Southern states seceded, a committee under the direction of South Carolinian William Porcher Miles was established to design all of the symbols for the new Confederacy. Much to Miles's dismay, the committee designed a national flag that greatly resembled the flag of the nation they had just seceded from.[2] The flag that was chosen as the national flag was referred to as the "stars and bars," a flag featuring one blue corner with a circle of white stars overlaying three alternating stripes, two red and one white. This episode is one of the great ironies of history—many within the Confederacy still clung to the United States flag in the same way that their descendants would cling to the symbol of the long dead Confederacy. The newly chosen Confederate national flag proved itself ill-suited for battlefield use almost immediately.[3] Due to the nature of the flag's close resemblance to the Union flag, cases of mistaken identity were common: Confederate soldiers would either engage in friendly fire, or not fire on a group of Union soldiers they believed to be friendly. This

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[2] John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 3-5.
[3] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 4.

created a need for a new flag, one that could be used to distinguish friend from foe on the battlefield.

While Miles may have lost the metaphorical battle on the National flag, he did end up winning the war. The design he favored, a blue St. Andrew's cross on a red field with stars to represent each state of the Confederacy, would eventually become the Confederate battle flag. This flag had the major advantage of being clearly distinct from the Union flag. Despite some initial pushback from various states desiring to continue using their own individual battle flags, the Confederate battle flag championed by Miles would eventually become ubiquitous throughout the ranks of the Confederate army. Though the battle flag was only ever officially used by the Confederate military, by the end of the Civil War it had become the *de facto* symbol of the Confederacy.[4] It is this esteemed position of the flag as representative of the Confederacy that gives the flag its controversial nature today.

The problem of defining the meaning of both the flag and the goals of the Confederacy as a whole laid the groundwork for controversy from the beginning. Disputes regarding the proper use and historical place of the flag have been a fixture of American life since Reconstruction. For most of the flag's history, it was not used to champion a message of racism or white supremacy. The flag's connection to white supremacy comes from its connection to the goals of the Confederacy, another hotly contested topic. As Coski explains, "defenders of the flag have insisted vehemently that the Confederacy did not exist to defend or preserve slavery."[5] Flag defenders through the decades have insisted that the flag is instead a symbol of a plethora of other noble causes, including states' rights, Southern heritage, and the memory of the young men

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[4] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 19.
[5] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 21.

who fought to preserve these high ideals. Distancing the flag from the legacy of slavery has been a key issue for many flag apologists from both the North and the South.

Due to the Confederate Flag's complicated symbolic history, it has been a lightning rod for controversy. During Reconstruction, the flag was for all intents and purposes banned throughout the South.[6] The flag was seen as an emblem of anti-union sentiment. As such, the occupying U.S. army saw its suppression as a necessary part of the process of reunification. In the immediate aftermath of the Confederate surrender, Union forces began capturing Confederate flags and turning them into the war department. Rather than allow their beloved symbol to fall into enemy hands, many Confederate soldiers chose to either destroy or bury them.[7] Those soldiers that were able to hold onto their battle flags held them in the highest esteem as "pieces of wool and cotton that were defended to the death on the battlefield and consecrated with the blood of soldiers."[8] This devotion to the flag as a symbol of the sacrifice of Confederate war dead remained a constant theme throughout the decades after the Civil War.

After the last federal forces withdrew in 1877, the flag was no longer banned. It did not, however, immediately become a prominent political symbol in any context. Rather, it continued to be used in an exclusively memorial way. The flag held a prominent position especially at events to honor Confederate soldiers, such as Memorial Day and monument dedications.[9] Confederate veterans and supporters held strong emotional ties to the flag during this time period. In one instance, a parade to dedicate a statue of General Stonewall Jackson was nearly

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[6] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 47.
[7] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 40-43.
[8] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 43.
[9] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 43.

derailed after the Governor of Virginia asked Confederate heritage organizations to limit their use of the flag.[10]

For nearly 100 years after the end of the Civil War, these memorial events were the only recorded uses of the Confederate flag. It was not immediately used to advance any sort of political agenda, racist or otherwise. The Ku Klux Klan, the exemplar of white supremacist terrorist organizations, did not use the flag in any way until its second incarnation in the 1940s.[11]. This period of a relatively apolitical flag gives its modern supporters leverage to argue for its rightful place as a peaceful historical symbol. Since the Klan's adoption of the flag in the '40s, however, the flag has not disappeared from the national scene, and has been overtly politicized. During the 1950s and 1960s the flag was used in explicitly racist fashion as a symbol of opposition to the Civil Rights movement. Jesse Stoner, founder of the anti-civil rights "National States' Rights Party" explicitly declared the flag as the primary symbol of his racist ideology. John M. Coski cites Stoner instructing his followers that the flag "is now a symbol of the White race and White supremacy. Fly it on your car and house."[12] This statement and the sentiment behind it were echoed throughout the ranks of those opposed to civil rights. As such, the Confederate battle flag arose as a deeply entrenched symbol of the anti-civil rights movement. The flag became a common sight at rallies against integrating schools and other public places. From this period on the flag had an extensive public link with racism, despite the intentions and wishes of many flag supporters.

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[10] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 80-82.
[11] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 49.
[12] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 143-144.

It was also during this period of the Civil Rights Movement that the Confederate flag began to be aligned with the Conservative movement. Whites across the South became increasingly worried about what they perceived as an immense threat posed by the forced integration of schools and public places championed by the federal government. This was seen, to them, as yet another of the continuous assaults being levied against traditional family values. Individuals with these concerns looked to the idealized former Confederacy as a paragon of the society they hoped to maintain. Therefore, it follows logically that they would adopt the Confederate flag as a symbol of their movement. Coski quotes one of the leaders of these opponents of Civil Rights as declaring "..the Confederate flag has become a symbol of resistance for all Whitefolk, both North [and] South… in the fight against forced race mixing."[13] This statement is particularly instructive not only in showing how the Confederate flag became a symbol associated with the social conservative movement, but also in how it became a transregional symbol. Northerners were, in many cases, just as resistant to integration as were Southerners. For example, when new Federal law following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 required integration in the schools of Boston, whites felt "trodden" on and fought vigorously to oppose the federal intervention.[14] Whites in Indianapolis also recoiled against forced school integration, supporting arguments made by politicians such as President Richard Nixon who argued that forced integration was a case of one evil creating an even larger evil.[15] As the issue of civil rights provided common ground for conservative whites in both the North and the South, the Confederate flag became no longer a merely regional symbol of the South, but a wider

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[13] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 144.
[14] Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), 4-5.
[15] Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Indianapolis Story: School Segregation and Desegregation in a Northern City* (Indianapolis, 1993), 304.

symbol of resistance to forced cultural change and interference from the federal government. While it would be wildly inaccurate to say that all, or even most, modern conservatives would be against integration, this episode is crucial in understanding how political conservatives in all regions of the country have come to adopt the Confederate flag as a symbol of their ideological movement. Conservatives across the country viewed forced integration as an overreach of the Federal government into state and local affairs.

The flag's use in explicit racist contexts and its adoption as a symbol of political conservatism came under fire almost immediately from Confederate heritage groups—groups who supported the flag, but as a ceremonial and memorial symbol. For example, the United Daughters of the Confederacy saw such actions as misusing the flag and disrespecting the memory of Confederate war dead. The UDC, and other Confederate heritage groups, supported state-based legislative action to make use of the flag outside of honorary activities illegal.[16] In seeking this legislative action, heritage organizations were trying to halt the progress of history and return the flag to the place as an honorary and commemorative symbol it had held during Reconstruction and the period immediately following. These laws were short lived, however, as the United States Supreme Court rulings in separate cases involving the United States flag invalidated any laws that sought to limit a symbol's use, on the grounds that these laws violated the First Amendment.[17] As the Court ruled that no entity, not even the Federal Government, had the power to define the meaning of a symbol, the flag was left open to a wide variety of potential uses and potential meanings. As a result of this openness, and as a result of the complex symbolic history of the Confederate battle flag, it has been used for a wide variety of purposes

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[16] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 168-169
[17] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 176-177.

and has taken on a seemingly endless variety of meanings to different groups of people. This symbolic ambiguity has allowed it to evolve beyond a merely regional symbol and to become a national symbol of rebellion against changing cultural and political tides.

The issue of Federal intrusion is connected to perhaps the most crucial issue that bound conservatives and supporters of the Confederate flag together during the Civil Rights movement—the issue of states' rights. Conservative politicians throughout the country, from the North as well as the South, argued against Civil Rights legislation not on racial grounds, but on separation of powers and states' rights grounds. This argument was pioneered during the 1964 Presidential campaign of Senator Barry Goldwater. In his political treatise *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater lambasts both major political parties for supporting the expansion of Federal powers into what he argues are areas in which only the states have jurisdiction.[18] Aware of the implications his argument had the for raging civil rights debate, Goldwater devotes an entire chapter to refuting the claim that support for states' rights must automatically signal support for racist policies. The Senator angrily decries what he sees as an "imaginary conflict" between states' rights and civil rights.[19] According to Goldwater, it is perfectly possible to be a decent person, to not be a racist, and yet not support civil rights as defined in the 1960s. Goldwater argued that the Federal government's use of these "creative powers" was a blatant usurpation of powers granted exclusively to the states in the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution.[20] The anti-civil rights argument pioneered by Goldwater and laid out in *The Conscience of a Conservative* formed the backbone of the Conservative movement's opposition to civil rights. This line of argument also forms the foundation of the intellectual movement

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[18] Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative.* (New York, 1960), 25-26.
[19] Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative,* 32.
[20] Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative,* 33.

which joined Northern and Southern conservatives in support of the Confederate flag particularly as a symbol against this kind of federal overreach.

Goldwater's 1964 Presidential campaign marked the fist overt overtures by a Conservative Republican to Southern racists. Conservatism has always been a fractured movement. Goldwater widened these fractures and emboldened the more far right factions, the same factions most likely to be proud supporters of the Confederate flag. During the 1964 campaign, the Republican Party "openly courted white supremacists."[21] This entailed courting supporters of the Confederate flag as well, as there was a great deal of overlap between the two groups. Goldwater came no where close to completing his goal of winning the White House, however he was incredibly successful in bringing the ideals of the Neo-Confederate movement, especially support for the Confederate flag, into the Conservative movement and the institutional Republican party. This is demonstrated plainly by the fact that the few states Goldwater won outside of his home state of Arizona were all part of the former Confederacy.[22]

Another shining example of a prominent politician using the states' rights argument to oppose civil rights is provided by George H.W. Bush, a congressman from Texas during the Civil Rights Era and later Vice President and President of the United States. Bush was a Northerner who had moved to the South for employment with an oil company, and as such had no direct ties to the former Confederacy. However, in order to appeal to Southern conservatives in his 1964 Senate campaign, Bush was a vocal opponent of the Civil Rights Act. In a biography of his father, President George W. Bush is careful to explain that "My father had always been a strong believer in equal treatment of all people…Dad had opposed the Civil Rights Act on

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[21] James W. Loewan and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause,"* (Mississippi, 2010), 332.
[22] Loewan and Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader,* 332.

federalism grounds. He believed that states, not the federal government, should control the regulation of public places."[23] By reframing segregation and other issues as states' rights issues, Bush hoped to broaden his appeal to a wider variety of Southern conservatives while not losing the support of moderates who might have been uneasy with maintaining legal segregation.

Around the time period of the Civil Rights Movement and Republican politicians championing states' rights, the Confederate flag took on another, incredibly complex dimension as it entered the popular culture scene. For many in the North, especially the white rural North, the flag is and always has been a part of everyday life. Nearly every aspect of rural popular culture became infused with an idealized vision of the Southern way of life. NASCAR racing, for example, began as a nearly exclusively Southern hobby, but became increasingly popular among Northern whites in the 1970s. Concurrent with the exportation of NASCAR came the exportation of other aspects of Southern culture, including the Confederate flag. This trend began with the popularity of Southern rock groups such as Lynrd Skynrd, who used Confederate symbolism and especially the Confederate flag frequently throughout their performances.[24] Other rock musicians, including Tom Petty and Indiana native John Mellancamp quickly followed suit and added the Confederate flag to their own performances.[25] Rock was hardly the only musical genre popular in the North to begin idealizing the Southern way of life, however. Today, country music is deeply connected to the idealized rural Southern lifestyle that Northern whites have become such fans of. This marriage of country music and Southern symbolism, especially the

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[23] George W. Bush, *41: A Portrait of my Father.* (New York, 2014), 86-87.
[24] Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past,* (Washington, 1995), 109-111.
[25] Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture,* 128-129.

Confederate flag, began with the music and performances of Charlie Daniels and his contemporaries in the 1960s.[26]

The trends which began in NASCAR and music carried over into the domain of television. Television shows romanticizing the rural way of life became popular in the 1970s with programs such as *The Waltons.* However, the Southern and rural way of life reached a new zenith of romance with the introduction of *The Dukes of Hazzard* in the late 1970s.[27] *The Dukes of Hazzard* features two young "good ole boys" having adventures in their Dodge Charger—the aptly named "General Lee" complete with a Confederate flag painted across the roof. It is precisely this carefree, adventurous rural lifestyle that many in the rural North associate the Confederate flag with. Due to its deep connection to the kind of Southern popular culture which has ingrained itself in the white rural North, the Confederate flag has become intrinsically tied with "redneck" culture. For many, it is an integral part of the typical Northern small town atmosphere.

As Southern culture became more and more ubiquitous, and as the South itself became a much more crucial electoral prize, the Republican Party shifted its focus to capturing the votes of Southerners and their conservative Northern allies. To do this, the GOP developed a "Southern Strategy" of focusing on the south and issues important to the South. This strategy was first tried with the Goldwater candidacy of 1964. Though this strategy had little success—Goldwater lost in a landslide—the results were much better the next time around. By the time of the 1968 election, the support of Southern conservatives was essential for any Republican candidate. Richard Nixon was able to secure the Republican nomination only after Strom Thurmond, the

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[26] Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture,* 111.
[27] Jack T. Kirby, *Media Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination.* (Athens, GA., 1986), 163.

leading figure among Southern conservatives, used his influence to marshal Southern delegates to support Nixon during the convention.[28] Nixon's appeals to Southern conservatives continued into the general election, forming a crucial part of his campaign. In order to win over the South, Nixon moved the party-line to the right on important issues, including busing as a means of school desegregation. This strategy clearly paid off, as Nixon won every state of the old Confederacy except for Texas.[29] Richard Nixon found success employing the Southern strategy, and was elected to the Presidency.[30]

The Watergate scandal set the party back a bit, but the candidacy of Ronald Reagan provided a new opportunity for the GOP to once again find electoral success employing the Southern strategy. This strategy was on blatant display during the kickoff event for Reagan's general election campaign in the fall of 1980. The candidate appeared in a Mississippi county famous for the deaths of three civil rights workers less than twenty years prior to his appearance. Rather than make any reference to this event, however, Reagan spoke vaguely of states' rights.[31] As has previously been mentioned, states' rights was a code word used by conservative politicians to tap-dance around the issue of Civil Rights, and a unifying force for Northern and Southern conservatives. By deftly adding states' rights to his platform of social and fiscal conservatism, Reagan was able to ensure the union of Northern and Southern conservatives. At this point, the GOP had officially become the party of the South, and with it the Confederate flag.

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[28] George B. Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (Georgia, 1972), 67-68.
[29] Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South, 68.*
[30] Loewan and Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader,* 18.
[31] Loewan and Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader,* 18.

Without a doubt, since the development of the Southern strategy supporters of the Confederate flag have allied themselves with a large portion of the Conservative movement. The political connection between flag supporters and ideological conservatives provides the strongest explanation for the flag's prominent place in the modern North. To understand this link, however, it is important to understand the Conservative movement itself. As with any ideology conservatism and its followers are not a monolith. There are divisions and quarrels amongst its adherents as there are within any movement. A particular branch of the Conservative movement, one of the more vocal grassroots branches, has allied itself with those who support the flag. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship in which flag advocates favor conservative politicians and conservative politicians in turn defend the Confederate flag from government interference.

The fractures within the Conservative movement run deep. The beginnings of connections between the Confederate flag and conservatism during the Civil Rights movement is directly connected to emergence of a group known as paleoconservatives. Paleoconservatives can be described as "anti-modern reactionaries, nativists hostile toward immigration" who hold "family" and "tradition" as their most important values.[32] A central argument of paleoconservatives is that the "political elites" on both sides of the aisle were "out of touch with grassroots Americans" particularly on social issues. In addition to support for states' rights as previously discussed, conservative positions on social issues is another aspect that binds Conservatives in both the North and the South. As supporters of traditional family values and states' rights, Paleoconservatives had emphatically supported Ronald Reagan's candidacy in 1980. They felt particularly betrayed when President Reagan and other mainstream conservatives

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[32] Euan Hague and Edward H. Sebesta, "Neo-Confederacy and Its Conservative Ancestry," in *Neo-Confederacy: A Critical Introduction,* ed. By Euan Hague, Heidi Beirich, and Edward H. Sebesta (Austin, TX, 2008), 25.

did not take what they viewed as sufficient action on social issues, despite having run on socially conservative platforms.[33] In the late 1980s, paleoconservatives began closely and openly allying themselves with far right Southern intellectuals and, as part of the intellectual merging, added support for the continued unmolested use of the Confederate battle flag to their list of key issues.[34]

Though the Confederate flag spent the Civil Rights movement and the decades following that era slowly interweaving itself with Conservative politics, it did not become a high-profile political issue in and of itself until the 1990s. Among the first truly modern flag controversies erupted in 1993 when Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Illinois) rose to speak out on the Senate floor against renewing a patent for the symbol of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a symbol that included the Confederate flag. Senator Moseley-Braun argued that the flag had no place bearing the approval of the United States Senate as it was a symbol that she described as "an outrage…an insult"[35] due to its connection to slavery, the legacy of the Confederacy. Institutionally, the Senator was successful—she was able to sway the vote and the Senate decided 75-25 not to renew the patent. The vote was largely bipartisan, with both conservatives and liberals swayed by her rhetoric. The 25 Senators that voted to renew the patent were a mixture of Democrats and Republicans almost entirely from the South. In this case, Northern conservatives largely remained quiet. This would not be the case in future confrontations over the Confederate flag.

The next major political upheaval caused by the Confederate flag would come a few years later, this time stemming from an incident in Kentucky. In 1995 a group of African

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[33] Hague and Sebesta, "Neo Confederacy and its Conservative Ancestry," 26.
[34] Hague and Sebesta, "Neo Confederacy and its Conservative Ancestry," 30-31.
[35] Adam Clymer, "Daughter of Slavery Hushes Senate," *New York Times,* July 23, 1993.

American teenagers chased down, shot, and killed Michael Westerman, a young white man whose pick-up truck was adorned with the Confederate battle flag. There was swift and immediate outcry from around the country, as the attack on Westerman was viewed as a broader attack on the Confederate flag, its supporters, and the tradition they cherished. Westerman was hailed as a "fallen Confederate patriot."[36] In the aftermath of his death, flag supporters who now felt threatened began displaying the flag as an act of rebellion against the forces of those who would deny them that freedom.[37] This is a crucial point. As will be demonstrated shortly, after nearly every incident of controversy over the flag its visible support grows as those who favor the flag fly it as an act of defiance against those who wish to see the flag disappear.

In the case of the Westerman murder, national political figures mostly kept quiet. However, the socially Conservative far right groups who hold themselves responsible for preserving the Confederate legacy were anything but quiet. Groups including the Ku Klux Klan and the Southern League raced to Southern Kentucky in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, to show support for the continued use of the Confederate flag and to attempt to use the incident to recruit for their groups.[38] As with the Carol Moseley-Braun incident, however, the reaction to this incident, though intense, was mostly limited to Southern right wing groups. Northern conservatives, once again, stayed on the sidelines.

During the Presidential election of 2000, the Confederate flag once again became a political issue of national importance, if only for a brief period of time. Prior to the South Carolina primary election in February 2000, both Senator John McCain and Governor George

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[36] Tony Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York, NY, 1998), 108.
[37] Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic,* 97-99.
[38] Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic,* 97.

W. Bush were asked to state their opinion on the Confederate flag, a hot button issue for South Carolinians since an attempted NAACP boycott a few years earlier.[39] Senator McCain equivocated, attempting to take a middle of the road position that acknowledged the complex symbolic history of the flag. Governor Bush, on the other hand, offered a full-throated and unequivocal support of the flag and its continued display in a prominent place on the grounds of the South Carolina capitol.[40] Likely as a result of this passionate endorsement of the beloved Southern symbol, Bush won the primary and eventually went on to win the Presidency. This is clearly indicative that the GOP had followed the path which began with the Goldwater candidacy and the advent of the Southern strategy in 1964. The South was now a crucial part of electoral politics, and any Republican politician hoping to find electoral success needed to have the right stance not only on social and economic issues, but on the status of the Confederate flag. This understanding is crucial to understanding the role the flag plays in the modern cultural and political landscape.

Despite the occasional flare up, the issue of the Confederate battle flag's rightful place in modern America was largely left undiscussed. This all changed when, in the summer of 2015, a mentally disturbed white supremacist massacred nine African Americans at a church in Charleston, South Carolina. Among the symbols the murderer, Dylann Roof, commonly associated himself with was the Confederate battle flag. Investigators uncovered the Confederate flag among the plethora of racist and hateful symbols found in Roof's possession. This episode led to renewed calls for the flag's removal from public places, and ever hardened defense from

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[39] Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag,* 250.
[40] Steven A. Holmes, "After Campaigning on Candor, McCain Admits He Lacked It on Confederate Flag Issue," *New York Times* (New York, NY), April 20, 2000.

its supporters. In the aftermath of this tragic event, journalists, academics, and politicians alike set out to make sense of the issue.

Gregg Doyel, a sports writer for the Indianapolis Star, observed this at the Brickyard 400, a NASCAR event held at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Doyel notes that despite NASCAR's attempts to distance itself from the Confederate flag in light of the hate crime in Charleston, fans refused to stop flying their flags and IMS officials felt powerless to confiscate them. Doyel attempted to speak to one supporter at the event who was flying the Confederate flag over his motor home while watching the race. When Doyel asks the man to talk about why he is flying the flag, he becomes hostile and refuses to speak without his attorney present. [41] The NASCAR ban is indicative of Northern views on the Confederate flag. For many, it is simply a historical or a cultural symbol. While the man Doyel interviewed did not specifically explain why he flew the flag, his hostile reaction to even being questioned is indicative of a larger trend. When the belief that the flag is an innocuous historic symbol is questioned, flag supporters become defensive and assume they are under attack. This reflects a trend that has been seen before in instances where the Confederate flag has been seen to be under attack. For example, in the aftermath of the Westerman murder, a man flying the flag notes that he had "only begun flying the flag since Michael's death" adding "One goes down, two fill his space."[42] It is clear, therefore, that violence does nothing to deter use of the Confederate flag. It does not matter whether the violence is carried out by flag supporters or is carried out against them. The results are the same. In either type of case, violence and controversy only encourage further displays of the flag. In an interview with John II and his wife Aggie, both mentioned that they only chose to

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[41] Gregg Doyel, "His Flag Was Flying and I Had to Ask Why," *Indianapolis Star* (Indianapolis, IN), July 28, 2015.
[42] Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic,* 97.

begin flying a Confederate flag after the Roof shooting when political leaders started calling for the flag's removal from prominent places. They flew the flag as an act of defiance against the unnamed political elites they believed were attempting to take a harmless symbol out of context and infringe on individual rights. In the aftermath of the flag controversies of, they chose to rebel by flying a Confederate flag of their own.

When seeking to gain insight into the attitudes of Northern flag supporters, Mark Govaki, a writer for the Dayton Daily News, went in to one of their major cultural hubs—a country music concert. Govaki observed that for many, the flag is simply another symbol of the United States as a nation. When Govaki asked Matt Hill, a man from rural Indiana, why he chose to fly the Confederate flag, Hill responded that the flag was as much a patriotic symbol of the United States as the American Flag or a POW-MIA flag.[43] This demonstrates an important theme in the thinking of Northern flag supporters. To them, the flag has become a nationalized symbol—not one of only the South, and not one of a group of states which attempted to form their own nation. To them, assaults on the flag are treated as akin to an assault on any other American symbol, such as the U.S. Flag. A similar sentiment is expressed by an 18-year-old girl attending the concert with her friends, who explains to Govaki that the flag is a symbol of heritage. The girl goes on to explain that she grew up in a small town context in which nearly everyone she knew had a Confederate flag in some form.[44] This anecdote speaks clearly to how the Confederate flag has become such a commonplace symbol in the white rural North. Now, an attack on the flag's use in any context seems like an attack on the entire country, both North and South.

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[43] Mark Govaki, "Even Some Northerners back the Confederate Flag," *Dayton Daily News* (Dayton, OH), July 12, 2015.
[44] Govaki, "Even Some Northerners back the Confederate Flag."

Another man interviewed by Govaki, Tim Brown of Hamilton, Ohio, claims that in his experience nearly everyone is in support of the flag except for what he describes as a small group of whiners.[45] This is the most important trend among those who fly the Confederate flag in the North. For whatever reason an individual chooses to fly the Confederate flag, they see nearly any opposition to the flag as baseless outcry from a small but vocal group. This was a common feature in the interviews conducted with white rural Northerners.[46] Six individuals out of the eleven interviewed made a claim along those lines. It is precisely because of attempts to ban the Confederate flag that many flag supporters have allied themselves with the Conservative movement, particularly the wing of the movement which shuns elites and sees itself as being on the frontlines of a war against political correctness. The campaigns of prominent politicians, including President Donald Trump, have managed to tap into this backlash and ride it to electoral victory.

Donald Trump, still in the early stages of his campaign at the time of the Charleston shooting, initially argued for moving the Confederate flag to a museum. Trump's later embrace of the flag was a reversal form this initial stated position. The Roof murders forced a nationwide conversation about the rightful role of the Confederate flag and Confederate memory as a whole in the United States. This time, though the response began in the South, the entire nation was drawn into the conversation, and the clear partisan political divide on the issue of the Confederate flag fully revealed itself. Nikki Haley, the Republican Governor of South Carolina at the time of the incident, pushed for the removal of the Confederate flag from the grounds of

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[45] Govaki, "Even Some Northerners back the Confederate Flag."

[46] A total of eleven individuals were interviewed. These individuals have all spent large portions of their life living in small towns in the rural North. They come from various age groups, genders, and levels of education.

the South Carolina state capitol. Haley was ultimately successful, and in her response to President Obama's 2016 State of the Union address celebrated the moment by exclaiming "We removed a symbol that was being used to divide us."[47] The sentiments expressed by Haley were not shared by all Republicans, however. Among many staunch conservatives her reaction was a betrayal. Renewed threats to remove Confederate flags from the public view were met with an intense backlash. In the immediate aftermath of the Dylan Roof shooting, flag supporters responded by holding over 350 pro-flag rallies. One flag supporter put it this way "Take one flag down and 1,000 go up."[48] Then candidate Donald Trump reacted to this backlash in favor of the flag and immediately conducted a full pivot in his position on the issue, becoming one of the most outspoken supporters of maintaining display of the Confederate flag and, later, Confederate monuments. As a result of his outspoken support of the Confederate flag, and in spite of his New York heritage and earlier statements, Trump garnered a great deal of support from the flag supporting bloc. The same voters also identified another reason for supporting the President—his clear opposition to political correctness.[49] More than anything else, this key position, opposition to a culture of political correctness, has united the disenchanted conservatives most likely to support the continued use of the Confederate battle flag in both the North and the South. Donald Trump was able to effectively pick up on this and added support for the Confederate flag to the anti-pc battle cry he road to the White House.

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[47] Nikki Haley, Republican Response to the State of the Union Address, http://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/politics-columns-blogs/the-buzz/article54410190.html

[48] Mason Adams, "How the Rebel Flag Rose Again—And Is Helping Trump." https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/06/2016-donald-trump-south-confederate-flag-racism-charleston-shooting-213954

[49] Mason Adams, "How the Rebel Flag Rose Again—And Is Helping Trump."

Within the modern Republican Party, divisions over the Confederate flag remain. In modern Conservativism, the more mainstream wing of the party is the one which has been more open to placing some restrictions on prominent public display of the Confederate flag. For example, as has been discussed, former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley led the charge to remove the Confederate flag from the grounds of the South Carolina statehouse. Meanwhile, the less mainstream wing of conservatism championed by President Trump is much more in favor of the Confederate flag and resists efforts to remove it from the public square. This less mainstream wing holds to many of the ideological tenets first espoused by paleoconservatives, including feeling left behind in the culture wars and bucking the party line on economic issues. These issues will be discussed in more detail further on.

Easily the most recognizable link between the first conservatives to support he Confederate flag and modern Conservative supporters of the flag is the sense that both groups have felt betrayed by what they view as "out of touch elites" in both major parties. This is easy enough to see in elements of modern conservatism, as Donald Trump won the presidency largely based on a campaign to "drain the swamp" of the elites who, in the mind of the President and his supporters, have ruled without concern for the average individual. This, notably, occurred during the Reagan administration. As discussed previously, social conservatives felt betrayed by the Reagan administration. They voted for him because he ran on a platform of socially conservative principles, yet they did not feel like he went far enough to carry out policies supporting these principles, particularly on abortion.

This provides the most important link between these original outcast conservatives and modern flag supporting conservatives is their palatable fear of losing the so-called "culture wars." President Trump was able to successfully capitalize on these concerns to win his

campaign. Among the chief fears of neo-Confederate flag supporting groups are "cultural Marxism" and "globalist institutions."[50] These buzzwords underscore a basic fear that some all-powerful worldwide force stemming from the far political left is scheming to destroy traditional western culture. Those who have these fears are worried about losing the culture wars on an entire array of battlefields—from marriage and family, to abortion, to gun control. Lumped in with these issues is a fear that the Confederate flag—and with it their "heritage" will be taken away and smothered by the forces of leftist globalization. The exact same fears expressed by these neo-Confederate groups are the fears expressed in the modern alt-right—an extremist branch of right wing politics that focuses on social issues and white identity. These fears are exactly what drove an alliance of neo-Confederates, neo-Nazis, and alt-right supporters together for a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017.[51] Notably, this group has been overwhelmingly supportive of the Confederate battle flag, using it as a prominent symbol at their rallies and events.

The trends which have been described above are supported not just by anecdotal evidence, but by the hard evidence of scientific polling data. First and foremost, the polling data demonstrates that there is an incredibly sharp partisan divide. While 78% of Republicans agreed with leaving Confederate flags in their current position atop prominent government buildings, an equally overwhelming number of Democrats argued that the flags were a symbol of hatred and

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[50] Gerald R. Webster and Jonathan I. Leib, "Fighting for the Lost Cause: The Confederate Battle Flag and Neo-Confederacy," in *Neo-Confederacy: A Critical Introduction,* ed. By Euan Hague, Heidi Beirich, and Edward H. Sebesta (Austin, TX, 2008), 185.

[51] Madison Park, "Why White Nationalists Are Drawn to Charlottesville" 12 August 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/11/us/charlottesville-white-nationalists-rally-why/index.html

should be taken down.[52] Support for the Confederate flag has become almost entirely a partisan issue. Conservatives overwhelmingly either support the flag outright or, at the very least, don't see any problem with those who do. Liberals, meanwhile, tend to view the flag as a racist symbol and fight for its removal from the public square.

Other polling data reveals several interesting demographic trends. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that there is no regional divide on the issue. One might have expected that support for the Confederate flag would be significantly stronger in the South based on the flag's historic association with that region. This is not the case, however. An individual from the South is no more inherently likely to support the Confederate flag than someone from any other region. In fact, Southerners had the largest percentage of respondents to the poll claim that the flag was a symbol of racism. This surprising twist clearly demonstrates that regional affiliation is in no way a reliable predictor of viewpoint on the Confederate flag. Gender is another category which yields no significant statistical determination for views on the Confederate flag. However, levels of income, race, and education *are* all strong indicators. People who are of lower income levels, have less education, and are white are, statistically, more likely to support the Confederate flag, while those on the opposite end of the spectrum are more likely to view the flag as a symbol of racism.[53] In addition to those in the rural North being predominantly white, they are also usually

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[52] Jennifer Martinez, "Poll shows how divided Americans have become in the debate about Confederate monuments and flags." http://www.businessinsider.com/poll-confederate-monuments-flags-2017-8

[53] "Trump's Domestic Crisis: Charlottesville and White Nationalists." http://www.businessinsider.com/poll-confederate-monuments-flags-2017-8

of lower socioeconomic status and have usually achieved less education.[54] These key factors align the rural North perfectly with the demographic groups most likely to support the Confederate flag.

It is not at all surprising that income, education, and race are indicative of views on the Confederate flag. These demographic details are known to be indicative of political party preferences. The overlap occurs exactly as expected, with those demographics that typically hold conservative political viewpoints clearly supporting the Confederate flag, while those who oppose the flag fall into the demographic groups that traditionally ally themselves with liberals. Hence, support for the Confederate flag clearly hinges almost entirely on political affiliation. Every other demographic factor points back to politics as the determinant factor. This single key factor, more than any other, reveals why the flag has shed its political affiliation and become as prominent a figure in the white rural North as it is anywhere in the South.

Interviews with a wide array of people who either currently live in the rural North or did at some point in their lives support the poll results except for one category. These people represent a cross section of several different key demographics. Four respondents were in the 18-25 age range; three in the 45-55 age range; and four in the 70-80 age range. Of those interviewed, roughly half either had college education or were currently enrolled in college, and half had a high school diploma. Six were women and five were men. The political affiliations of the interviewees were all across the spectrum, from far right conservatives and supporters of President Trump, to far left leaning-liberals. The interviewees were chosen based only on having

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[54] Carmen DeNavas-Walt and Bernadette D. Proctor, "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014." September 2014. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-252.pdf

extensive experience living in the rural North, as their views provide key insight into how rural Northerners of several different key demographics conceptualize the issue of the Confederate flag.

The clearest trend that emerged from the interviews was that every individual who supported continuing to allow the Confederate flag to have a prominent place in the public square was of a conservative political persuasion. This was true regardless of the other demographic indicators. In fact, the more conservative the individual's political leanings, the more likely the individual was to emphatically support the Confederate flag. For example, John Sr. and Agatha, both in their mid 70s, identified as the staunchest conservatives of the pool of individuals interviewed. They were also the only people interviewed who actively display a Confederate flag, on two separate flag poles and on a front license plate attached to a pickup truck. They were emphatic that they viewed the flag as a historic symbol, and could not comprehend how anyone might view it as a symbol of hate.[55] John, the more conservative of the two, pointed out that the flag did not have all the meanings which "have been attached to it." This statement implies a view that is common among conservative flag supporters—that any negative meanings the flag may possess have been forced on it by malicious outside forces.

Other conservatives interviewed held similar viewpoints. John III and Denise both argued that the flag was a historic symbol and was not associated with racism. John III also blamed the media for attributing negative attributes to the flag where, in his opinion, none actually existed. Nineteen-year old Adam, the youngest person interviewed, also held conservative views. While he was not himself a supporter of the Confederate flag, he also argued that it was a historical

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[55] John and Aggie Glaub, interview with the author, 9 October 2017, in Austin Glaub's possession

symbol.[56] In fact, every single person interviewed mentioned somewhere in their responses that they viewed the Confederate flag largely as a part of history. There was one notable exception, however. Alyssa, who identifies as a liberal politically, does not see the Confederate flag primarily as a historical symbol.[57] While she acknowledged its role in history, and claimed it had a place in historical locations such as battlefields, she did not believe that the flag's historical significance was its primary symbolic meaning. She identified it more as a symbol of "slavery, oppression, and racism." Her identification with the political left concurs with the literature and polling data—those who identify with social conservative values are more likely to see the flag primarily as a historical symbol, while the political left is more likely to negatively associate it with racism and oppression of minorities.

Recent controversies regarding the flag changed surprisingly few people's opinions. Not even the intense national debate after the Dylan Roof massacres had any significant effect in changing views about the flag. In the instances where change was observed due to flag controversies, individuals only moved more staunchly in the direction they were already leaning. The most obvious example of this was John II and his wife Aggie. While both were generally supportive of the Confederate flag prior to the controversies, neither actively flew the flag. In the late summer of 2015 as the nationwide controversy was at its peak, they decided to start flying two Confederate battle flags on their property. In Aggie's words, "I went out and bought one as soon as they tried to tell me I couldn't have one."[58] When asked why he chose to fly the flag, John added, "in contempt for the things being said about it now."[59] Clearly, for these two

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[56] Adam Glaub, interview with the author, 8 October 2017, in Austin Glaub's possession.
[57] Alyssa Larsen, interview with the author, 31 October 2017, in Austin Glaub's possession.
[58] Aggie Glaub, Interview with the author.
[59] John Glaub Sr., interview with the author.

individuals, flying the Confederate flag is an act of rebellion. This is consistent with other evidence revealed, in which individuals chose to begin flying the flag as an act of defiance towards those who make negative claims about it or seek to remove it from the public square.

Interviewers also commonly blamed outsiders for attributing negative meaning to the Confederate flag. The media and liberals were common targets of this scorn. Kenny was particularly outraged at the media's influence. He recalled serving alongside African-Americans and whites who carried Confederate flags without any incident for several years in the 1960s. To him, all recent flag controversies and the negative attention being given to the Confederate battle flag are the result of the "media raising Cain about nothing."[60] Kenny's wife Evy concurred, noting that the Confederate flag had always been a "redneck" symbol to her, and that her son flies several Confederate flags, yet isn't racist.[61] She also blamed the media for attaching an unwarranted negative spin to the Confederate flag. John Sr. and Aggie also blamed the media, though in less specific and heated terms.[62] Denise did not assign specific blame, but she did say that the flag was attached to racial issues only because "people make it about race."[63] In fact, the only people who did not assign blame to some outside force—Adam, Jennifer, and Alyssa—were all in the youngest cohort of the pool. The older individuals seemed more inclined to blame malicious outside forces stigmatizing the flag.

In general, it appeared that the older individuals seemed to have the most acute stances on the Confederate flag—that is, they were generally more supportive of it, and more vocal about their support. For the young conservative leaning individuals, Adam and Mike both mentioned

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[60] Kenneth Kuntz, interview with the author, 9 October 2017, in Austin Glaub's possession.
[61] Evalena Kuntz, interview with the author, 9 October 2017, in Austin Glaub's possession.
[62] John and Aggie, interview with the author.
[63] Denise Glaub, interview with the author, 30 October 2017.

some level of support for the Confederate flag, but were willing to acknowledge possible other viewpoints.[64] In the middle-aged group, support for the Confederate flag became clearer and stronger. Finally, in the oldest age group, individuals were not only clearly supportive of the flag, but seemed to become agitated at the thought that anyone could see the flag as a hateful, racist symbol. These respondents grew up with the flag, and it has been a commonplace symbol that has gone unquestioned for nearly the entirety of their lives in the rural north. These individuals have grown angry because a fundamental part of their culture is being questioned in an extremely negative light on the national political stage. This also likely explains the tendency to blame outside forces—as they've never observed any issues with the flag, they attribute the creation of issues to forces outside of their experience.

This generational gap revealed by the interviews is significant and has not been explored in the literature. While the sample size was too small to draw any definitive conclusions, the findings were certainly indicative that a trend may exist relative to age and views on the Confederate flag. It appears that younger individuals, across the political spectrum and across different demographic groups such as age, gender, and education level are less attached to the Confederate flag. Exploring this issue in future studies is crucial. If this trend holds up, the political landscape relative to the Confederate flag may be changing drastically in the future as younger generations who have less attachment to the flag take over political leadership.

While the Confederate flag may have begun its existence and spent most of history as a purely Southern symbol attached to the former Confederacy, it has clearly not remained this way. The Confederate flag found its way into the North via a popular culture which glorified a

[64] Adam Glaub interview with the author, 8 October and Michael Jones, interview with the author 31 October 2017

carefree Southern rural way of life and a political landscape which values tradition and states' rights. The Confederate flag became deeply intertwined with the conservative movement beginning during the Civil Rights movements. Conservatives in both the North and the South opposed Civil Rights ostensibly on the grounds of states' rights. The Confederate flag became the rallying symbol of a transregional alliance against this perceived federal overreach. The political goals of Northern and Southern conservatives fused even further from the late '60s to the early '80s as the Republican Party's "Southern strategy" of appealing to Southern conservatives formed a crucial part of their electoral successes. Over time, the Confederate battle flag became one of the most prominent symbols of the rural white North. In the modern era, the Confederate flag has become intrinsically associated with the "redneck" culture that forms a backbone of the white rural North. On the modern political landscape, the flag exists primarily as an act of rebellion to political and cultural elites. For many in the the rural North, the flag is yet another front on the seemingly endless culture wars. As this study has shown, the Confederate flag has always been a politically divisive issue. Based on interviews with rural white Northerners however, there is some indication that a shift may be occurring within conservatism. It appears that younger conservatives, unaffected by the decades in which the Southern strategy dominated conservative politics, are much more open to debate on the meaning of the Confederate flag. As these younger conservatives rise to positions of influence in politics and the media, it is quite possible that seismic shifts will begin to occur as the mainstream conservative movement abandons the Confederate flag. Whether or not this shift occurs, recent trends have made it clear that the debate over the role of the Confederate flag in the modern United States is here to stay into the foreseeable future.

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